

The Feline Menu

"I hunt, therefore I am"

By Victoria J. Papa

Our house cats, descendants of much larger wild cats of the North African Savannah, are natural born hunters. Like her wild cousins, the healthy kitten is born with all the tools needed for survival, and she will quickly learn to use them if given the opportunity. For thousands of years felines have been making a living by hunting in an arid landscape. **Cats providing food for themselves obtain most of their hydration from their diet, freshly killed prey, which is:**

High (animal) protein / high moisture (60-70%)

Pet owners and veterinarians are in the midst of a wide learning curve on this subject. The effects of too many overly processed, convenience style-food products have been shown to be detrimental to human health, and we are finding the same is true for our pets. In recent years, pet care professionals have been suspecting that serious illnesses such as allergies, diabetes, obesity, kidney and liver disease, bladder problems, inflammatory bowel disease, and other illnesses may be preventable. **Meat-eating dictates the physical and emotional characteristics of all cats, large and small, and is the primal motivation for every tabby's sense of fun and adventure. Your housecat's playful behaviors are simply simulations of hunting.**

Since felines evolved obtaining most of their moisture requirements from their diet, not a river or a lake, they have a naturally low thirst drive. The instincts and physical needs of our housecats are still closely aligned with those of their wild ancestors. This means that cats need to get their water from their diet, not a water bowl. Cats have highly concentrated urine that carries large amounts of metabolic waste in a low volume of urine. Dietary moisture dilutes the urine, thus helping to prevent the formation of mineral crystals that are part of what is considered FLUTD (Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease). **Dietary moisture is vital to your cat's urinary tract health.**

Cats have a fast, acidic digestive system that is very efficient at turning animal protein into glucose for energy. Dry pet foods cannot be made without considerable percentages of carbohydrate from grains or vegetables – they give the food its shape. Excessive carbohydrate from non-meat sources are detrimental to feline health, as it disrupts normal healthy body function (including urine Ph) and is stored by the body as fat. A cat that is over 30% overweight is considered by veterinarians to be pre-diabetic. **Meat supports a healthy bladder environment, and provides essential amino acids that cannot be obtained from anything other than animal protein.**

What does that mean to most of us? In the very simplest terms, it means choosing between a dry food and a moist food diet. Humans are omnivorous, which means we are able to consume and utilize an infinite variety of animal protein and vegetation. Dogs, it seems, are able to tolerate a limited variety of both animal and non-animal derived foods. But cats are obligate carnivores that *require* a diet rich in animal protein *and fats*. **In general, canned cat food contains more minimally processed animal protein, is lower in carbohydrates, and is about 65% moisture. Comparatively, dry kibble is highly processed, lower in animal protein, contains more non-meat additives, and is very low in moisture (10-12%).** Other options would include a commercially prepared raw diet (available in the frozen section of your pet food supply store), or a homemade diet, either raw or cooked.

Our cats are completely dependant upon us for all their needs. Appropriate nutrition is as important for the health of our animals as is proper veterinary care, and keeping them indoors for safety. Feeding an animal as nature designed is one of the most basic aspects of humane care. **A fun and stimulating environment filled with fresh air, fresh water, plenty of love and species appropriate food is a recipe success!**